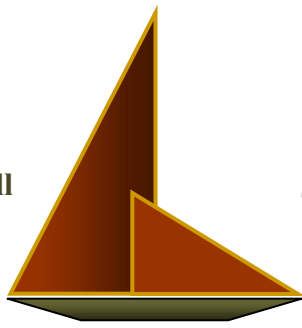


“To realize your individual vision, you will inevitably need the help of other people.”

Charlotte Roberts, *The Fifth Discipline* Fieldbook.



Sailboats Unlimited

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Sailboat Alumni Lead the Way to Improved Communication.

Think back to your Sailboat experience and recall the assumptions and misunderstanding that characterized the early rounds or perhaps the entire simulation.

For instance, how long did it take you to understand exactly what you were paying for and how many boats you built per round?

As you recall, the more you opened up communication with your customers and suppliers and each other, the more quickly you progressed to your final success.

Understanding “Mental Models” is Key to Breaking Down Communication Barriers.

I learned about Mental Models in Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, which, incidentally, everyone should own. “Mental models are the images, assumptions, and stories which we carry in our minds of ourselves, other people, institutions, and every aspect of the world. Like a pane of glass framing and subtly distorting our vision, mental models determine what we see. Human beings cannot navigate through the complex environments of our world without cognitive “mental maps”; and all of these mental maps, by definition, are flawed in some way” (p. 235).

For instance, I have a mental model of how a team should function or how decisions should be made that may differ from yours. What stands in our way is that we perceive these differences as flaws and afflictions instead of opportunities for creating whole new possibilities.

In Sailboat you were confined by the mental model that you had to leave your inventory on your supplier's dock. As soon as you changed that mental model, you produced boats more efficiently.

So how do we overcome the mental models that hold us back, and how do we create new ones that move the organization forward?

- ✘ Discuss your own mental models openly and make your thinking visible to those around you.
- ✘ Use reflection to slow down the thinking process and learn about one another's assumptions.
- ✘ Use **The Ladder of Inference** to eliminate knee-jerk reactions, manage emotion, and move from defensive positions to problem solving.
- ✘ Acknowledge frustration and conflict and view them as opportunities to solve problems.
- ✘ Use inquiry to break down mental models: What do we know for a fact? What do we think we know but can't prove? What don't we know? What can we design to help us learn more?
- ✘ Create new mental models to get “unstuck” and create possibilities.

Notes from Jennifer



One of the biggest challenges during the Sailboats exercise is to monitor your own actions and reactions.

Of course, the temptation is to see the faults in others before we look at ourselves. There are reasons for this.

We're often blind to our own issues because of arrogance, insecurity, or simple lack of awareness. Sometimes, we make others small so that we can be big. And some people are simply hard wired to believe they are right and others are wrong.

I encourage all Sailboats alumni to perform regular, honest self-assessments.

Look at the impact you have on your colleagues and your organization. Constantly ask, “Are my behaviors, reactions, or interactions contributing to or detracting from team effectiveness?” You might want to share your insights with colleagues.

Your honesty and openness will encourage others to do the same thing.

To learn more about self-assessment, click here to read the article, [Personal Mastery](#).

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